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Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

(HANSARD) Published under the authority of The Honourable Dan D'Autremont Speaker

N.S. VOL. 57 NO. 65A THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2015, 10:00

Gay-Straight Alliances

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, this government's position on GSAs [gay-straight alliance] is becoming a national embarrassment. When the Premier reversed his position on strip clubs, he said it was necessary even to protect just one person from increased risk of human trafficking. But when it comes to protecting vulnerable kids, the Premier refuses to budge. He prefers a vague policy released in secret with absolutely no publicity, and he refuses to enshrine this right in legislation.

Experts say this legislation would make a big difference for a lot of kids, Mr. Speaker. But my question, my question to the minister: even if it saves just one life, even if it prevents one suicide, why don't we do it? Why don't we put it in legislation?

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how you can have a secretly released policy. There was nothing secret about it. We were very serious in communication with our education partners, and for the NDP to somehow portray that we're not prepared to provide the facilitation of GSAs is just wrong. The policy is adamant that if you're receiving public dollars from the government in Education, GSAs must be facilitated.

That policy is identical to the bill that they introduced in the House, Mr. Speaker. In fact, their bill is arguably pretty weak, because if you go to the section where there would be enforcement, what do they say? This is the NDP bill: "School administrators shall ensure that the Student Bill of Rights is respected and promoted in each school and that the Student Bill of Rights is posted in standard . . . [CNIB] . . ." and the thing goes on. But basically their bill says that school boards must do this.

You can do it by legislation. You can do it by regulation. We're doing it by policy tied to funding, Mr. Speaker. I said in estimates, if there's a need to go further we will, but right now we're going to work with school boards and all schools to make sure that GSAs are available freely and immediately in the province of Saskatchewan.

Gay-Straight Alliances

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Education minister admitted that he'd heard a number of instances in which students have been too afraid to ask for a GSA [gay-straight alliance] or they've asked and been declined. And he even admitted that students are far too afraid to identify themselves, so he's been unable to follow up. Shockingly, this is what the Premier calls "a happy circumstance." Why won't the Education minister stand up to the Premier and start properly protecting vulnerable kids?

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, a GSA, by definition — I'm quoting from mygsa website — is a ". . . student-led safe space group, is primarily a club for students, and so it's important that students lead in its creation."

We intend to work with school divisions to ensure that they are made available. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're doing three things. One, we're reviewing all of the complaints or issues that have come forward. And we understand people's reluctance to give their names, give their phone numbers, but we are working through to try and find out if there are any places in the province where GSAs have been requested that have not been provided.

But to take it further, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are going to do two other things. We have asked the ministry to develop a list of all of the division schools and to see which ones are already providing GSAs and whether there are any issues so that we can look at them on a school-by-school basis.

Finally, we've talked to the president of the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association] this morning and I've said, would your school nurse, would they be willing to provide a designate in each school, either a counsellor or a teacher whose name would be put on a school handbook, on a sign, or a website so that a student that's interested in starting a GSA would have a contact person to go to? We know that these are vulnerable students and we want to do everything we can to help them.

Gay-Straight Alliances

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no legitimate reason for this government to refuse to implement legislation to enshrine the rights of students to form gay-straight alliances or gender sexuality alliances, and the explanation from the Premier, the Education minister, and the Sask Party MLAs just don't add up. To the Education minister: what's the real reason this government is so afraid to pass legislation on GSAs [gay-straight alliance]? Is it because the Sask Party is afraid to offend social conservatives?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite and I agree on the benefits and the values of having GSAs in our schools. Both of us have seen the benefit that that gives to students. This isn't a matter about social conservatives or where you sit on the political spectrum. It's a matter of doing the right thing for students.

We have by policy directed that they shall exist in schools in each and every school where one has been requested by students. Everywhere we have checked, where there's been one requested, we have determined that one has been provided. Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite know of a place where one has not been provided, we would be pleased to continue to look at that and verify whatever is taking place. If a student is unable or unwilling to come forward and do that, have them do it through second-hand . . . through information, and we can check and follow it up there, or use the online reporting tool which is totally anonymous.

Our focus, Mr. Speaker, is and will continue to be to make sure that we do everything to ensure that our students have the supports that they need.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, here's a quote from government's own internal document, and I quote, "Sexual minority and gender-variant youth continue to experience discrimination, prejudice, and abuse." And we know that over half of LGBTQ students have thought about suicide, yet for some reason the Premier argued last week that we have a happy circumstance in our province where students don't need a legislated right-of-way to GSAs. Does the Education minister actually expect us to believe that he hasn't heard about kids encountering problems when trying to set up GSAs?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whether GSAs are enshrined by way of policy or by way of legislation makes no difference. It's difficult for a student to be willing to come forward and ask for it where they need it and where they require it. It is the goal of this government to ensure that it is required. Having it enshrined in legislation

doesn't make it any more easy or any more appropriate for a student to come forward if a student is having difficulty. We will continue to work to make sure that they are available in each and every school where a student has asked for it and, Mr. Speaker, we will reach out to students where we think that they're not being heard.

Mr. Speaker, I've heard the same kind of allegations that the member opposite has put forward. We have tried to follow up on any of those that we've heard. It would make no difference whether it's by way of legislation or by way of policy. We intend to find any place where the GSAs are not made available and make sure that in fact they are made available. We have not yet in fact found such a situation but, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work with students because that is the first priority of this government.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, Amanda Guthrie is the youth and education coordinator at the Avenue Community Centre in Saskatoon. She says, and I quote:

A lot of students that I work with have needed the support of friends or teachers when asking for a GSA, and the addition of legislation would only help students to feel more confident in their ask. Having legislation sets a precedent and puts power on the side of the student rather than the school or school division.

Amanda knows of students who have been denied or discouraged from establishing a GSA. Chandra McIvor has also worked in this area and knows of many students who've been denied or discouraged from establishing GSAs, and she says that this minister has heard about these circumstances too. Why is the minister bending over backwards to please social conservatives instead of the kids?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, I'd indicated earlier this has nothing to do with social conservatives or a political spectrum. This has only to do with providing services that are necessary. Whether it's enshrined legislation or otherwise makes no difference.

Mr. Speaker, I have a quote from Dan Shier, Queen City Pride, Global News, March 12, 2015: "I don't see it currently being a huge necessity just because students are getting the services and the spaces that they require." Mr. Speaker, our goal is to make sure that we provide the services wherever they are provided.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite and I will agree on one thing. We've heard students speak. We've heard students talk about the need for it, and if students aren't comfortable coming forward and raising the issue, we want to be able to reach out to them either through social media, through the online reporting tool, or whatever else. If a student isn't willing to give us their name, if they will at least tell us the school, then we can go to the school and find out.

Any time where we've heard the name of a school before, we've gone to that school and in fact found that a GSA existed. We haven't found a situation where one has been

refused. We have confidence in our schools that they're compliant with the policy and, Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to work that way.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: I would encourage the minister to read the whole quote when he's quoting folks about this issue. It's very, very important to do that.

That minister and that Sask Party government needs to recognize it's not good enough to leave this up to vulnerable youth to stand up and speak out. It's up to us in this Assembly to take a stand and enshrine this right in legislation. That would make a big difference for our students in our province. The minister's talk of possibly pulling funding is nothing but a ploy to avoid passing legislation.

To the Education minister: what will it take for the Sask Party government to shelve the social conservative . . . the excuses and finally show some real leadership when it comes to GSAs and vulnerable youth?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite can talk about making a symbolic gesture, and I appreciate that they may wish to do that. Our goal, Mr. Speaker, is to reach out to the students that need help, that need support. That is the one thing I agree with the member opposite the most on, and it's something that we want to do by finding the individuals that need help, working with them, making sure that supports are available in the school.

We've had good support from the schools. I give the schools credit for it. I give the school divisions credit. I give the individual teachers that are participating in it . . . And, Mr. Speaker, we want to continue going down that road.

Passing laws doesn't make it any easier for a student to admit that that student needs help. What does help is that we know that the students can find the resources. The students have a method of accessing it. And, Mr. Speaker, we encourage students to use the online reporting tool to write to us, write to us anonymously. We at least need to know where the school is so that we can do something within that school.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue doing that and I would urge the members opposite if they know of situations, help us bring them forward so that we can identify if there are gaps in it. Passing a law isn't going to make the gaps go away. Identifying where the gaps are and working with us will.

N.S. VOL. 57 NO. 62A MONDAY, MAY 11, 2015, 13:30

Gay-Straight Alliances

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday Sask Party MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] used some very strange logic while discussing gay-straight alliances or gender sexual alliances. Some of the social media responses about them included the following, and I quote, “Condescending and rude.” “Dismissive attitude.” “Horribly disrespectful to LGBT students and family realities in our province.”

When it comes to GSAs [gay-straight alliance], the Sask Party is bending itself into a pretzel trying to please social conservatives while still pretending they take this seriously, and vulnerable kids are paying the price. Mr. Speaker, can the Education minister please explain the government’s position?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite and myself share something in common. We have a strong belief in the benefit of GSAs and the benefit that they give to gay-straight students. Recently I was at an event at Bethlehem collegiate in Saskatoon. I heard a grade 11 student speak to several hundred classmates, several hundred other students about the benefits that he had experienced as a result of his participation in a GSA.

The fact that he had come forward voluntarily and was able to speak says where our society is now. It talks about where school boards are. It talks about where teachers are, and where our society is right now. The STF [Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation] recently passed a resolution in favour of gay-straight alliances, not in favour of legislating, but in favour of having them, and the support from teachers. And that resolution, Mr. Speaker, was passed unanimously.

We want to give people the credit, the respect that they deserve for going forward and doing that type of thing, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to work in that direction, Mr. Speaker. If they know somebody that is not receiving the supports they need, we’d invite them to tell us so that we can make sure that it happens.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday, a Sask Party MLA said over and over again that enshrining within legislation the rights of students to establish GSAs would infringe on the autonomy of school divisions. And the former minister of Education, the member for Regina Douglas Park said, “They are the best ones that are in the best position to make decisions around what is best for their communities, and it’s our intent to allow them to do that.”

To the Education minister: is it the government’s policy that school divisions should be allowed to say no to GSAs?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, I have a letter from Connie Bailey, president of Saskatchewan School Boards Association, dated April 28th. I will read a portion of that:

We feel it is unnecessary, as school divisions are responding to diverse and changing student needs every day and will continue to do so.

She writes in favour of the autonomy of school boards, and she goes on to say:

Whether it is starting a GSA or any club, boards of education in Saskatchewan respect diversity and are committed to providing students with opportunities to connect within their schools. We know that school divisions in our province are doing a great job in responding to student respect by ensuring they have places that are supportive, safe, and secure for clubs to meet.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association is in favour of that. We are unable to locate a school division or a school that has been unable or unwilling to provide a GSA when asked. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite raised the issue last week and, Mr. Speaker, I wrote to the members opposite and I said, if you know of specifics, please tell us so that we can deal with it directly. I do not have any specifics from them at this point in time, Mr. Speaker, but if the specifics come, we will deal with them.

N.S. VOL. 56 NO. 16A WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2013, 13:30

Combatting Bullying

Mr. Broten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've seen a fair bit of discussion over the past months, Mr. Speaker, about the issue of bullying. And that's a good thing, Mr. Speaker, because it demands our attention and it is a serious matter.

The opposition's concern about the anti-bullying report that was released by this government last week is that it didn't provide a lot of detail, and it didn't really have much of an action plan. But perhaps, Mr. Speaker, this afternoon this government is able to provide some of that detail. We know today that the federal government is introducing legislation dealing with online bullying. And we think this is a good thing, Mr. Speaker, and we welcome that. The anti-bullying report said that this government will simply assess the implications of these federal changes.

Surely this government has been consulted on this, these changes to the Criminal Code, so my question to the Premier: what implications does this government anticipate as a result of these changes?

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. This is an important issue. And the short answer to his question is we need to see exactly what the federal government is considering introducing into the House of Commons to determine whether or not in fact provincial legislation would be required. Certainly if it is, it's something that we would be open to. I think it's something that we would look at, but that's unclear at this point.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that of all of the provinces in the country, I think we were amongst the earliest to indicate our support for the federal Justice department, the Justice minister, as they look to ways to protect people in our country from cyberbullying. And that remains the position of the Government of Saskatchewan. We'll determine if provincial legislation is required once we see and understand fully exactly what the federal government is introducing.

The Speaker: I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Broten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The anti-bullying report also made mention of a website, Mr. Speaker. And we've long been supportive of a website to anonymously report online instances of bullying, Mr. Speaker, online so that the right actions can be taken and so that youth are indeed safe. So I was pleased to see this referenced in the report that was provided.

I was disappointed, however, in the long delay before the reality of having the website available for youth in the province and also disappointed at the lack of detail around this change in general. So my question to the Premier: who will be responsible for monitoring and following up on all the concerns brought forward through this anonymous reporting tool?

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. This model that he's referencing is based on the British Columbia ERASE [expect respect and a safe education] Bullying initiative, as members of the House will know. And I first heard about the initiative in detail at the summer premiers' meeting in Niagara though certainly our officials and the Legislative Secretary who was focusing on this was aware of it well before then, and its details.

Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure, in answer to the member's question, that we have a collaborative effort in terms of follow-up on any reports back through either the app, which is also an important part of this initiative, or the other means, the website, other means that folks will have, principally young people will have, to report incidents of bullying. And of course a collaborative effort is going to mean the Ministry of Education is very much involved. But we're going to need to be able to work with and rely on the leadership of local educators and school boards as well.

The Speaker: I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Broten: Mr. Speaker, the government's own Legislative Secretary for the anti-bullying initiative report states that 50 per cent of gay and transgender young people have thought about suicide — 50 per cent, Mr. Speaker — and 37 per cent have attempted suicide. We know that gay-straight alliances are helpful to these young people.

When it comes to GSAs [gay-straight alliance] the report says that schools “should respond positively,” but that's quite a vague statement, Mr. Speaker. We don't know what tools or information will be provided to students and to parents, and we also don't know what training and guidance will be provided to teachers and to school administrators. So my question to the Premier on the issue of GSAs: what are the details, to the Premier, beyond simply saying that schools should respond positively?

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to be corrected but I believe shortly after the member raised some of these questions, I think it was in the spring session, to the credit of the hon. member, that there was a bit of an audit of the website that government can provide, that is available to the education system, to ensure that there were appropriate links even now for those who are looking for the very thing that he is requesting in terms of supports for those who want to set up GSAs in our province, in schools across Saskatchewan. And I would note, Mr. Speaker, that there appears to be no impediments to that, certainly none that have come to our attention as a result of the work of the member for Saskatoon Fairview or the efforts of the Minister of Education.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

N.S. VOL. 56 NO. 14A MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2013, 13:30

Combatting Bullying and Provision of Information

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday the government released its anti-bullying report, and after reading it, we welcome some progress in certain areas. Six months ago the Premier had a difficult time even saying the word gay. And now we have the government release a report that includes some discussion about gay-straight alliances. So that's a good thing.

But the general consensus on this report, it's far too light on details and far too light on action. To the Education minister: why are there so few immediate steps being taken by this government to combat bullying and cyberbullying?

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Mr. Speaker, I take the issue of bullying very seriously on this side of the House, both cyberbullying, its impact on our students, and on the facilitation of GSAs [gay-straight alliance] right across Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and we hope the NDP do

as well.

I'm in receipt of this letter that I think was sent to you, Mr. Speaker, where the NDP are raising a point of privilege on this particular issue. Mr. Speaker, the facts around this case are interesting. They're saying that because the report was released at a school in Regina, that the privilege of members opposite have been violated in terms of accessing the information even though the critic who was just on his feet knows full well that the minister phoned him the night before, offered him a private briefing, offered him a copy of the document, Mr. Speaker.

I wonder if the Leader of the Opposition will clarify what kind of an outfit are they running over there, Mr. Speaker, when that offer was made to NDP members on the opposite side and then the next day, the next business day of the House, to play politics, they raise a point of privilege, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, cyberbullying is a major problem in our province, and yet this government simply says it will assess the implications of upcoming federal cyberbullying legislation. Other provinces have taken this issue seriously and have brought in their own cyberbullying legislation. When we raised this issue last November, the former minister of Education said he'd been monitoring other jurisdictions and released public reports on what they found. Mr. Speaker, it's been a full year and yet this government has taken so little action.

To the minister: why, over a year later, has this government done so little to actually address bullying and cyberbullying in this legislature? Thank you.

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, cyberbullying is something that we should take seriously, more seriously than other types of bullying because it's particularly insidious. It's a type of thing that follows a student home. A student can be cyberbullied while in their bedroom, while in what should be the comfort and security of their own home.

Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Justice has met with his federal counterpart and counterparts from other parts of the country, and we are working with them towards establishing appropriate federal legislation. Mr. Speaker, this is the type of things that falls within the federal criminal purview, and we look forward to seeing how it fits with the processes and procedures that we're following in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I can advise that there are steps that we are taking that will dovetail well with that, and we look forward to working with the federal government to have something that's appropriate and meets the needs of our students well.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the government's report

acknowledges that over half the young people that identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual seriously consider suicide. Around 37 per cent of young people that identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual have actually attempted suicide.

And while we welcome the fact that this government finally recognizes the value of gay-straight alliances — or at least the member from Saskatoon Fairview does — we had certainly hoped to see concrete help for establishing GSAs in schools. To the Education minister: what is the government planning to do to actually implement GSAs in our schools?

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We want to ensure that the availability of gay-straight alliances are available in all schools in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and, you know, we're confident that that's the case.

Mr. Speaker, I misspoke earlier on with respect to my comments on the NDP frankly playing some political games on this very important issue on the question of privilege. Mr. Speaker, my understanding is it wasn't a phone call but rather there was a face-to-face discussion between the Minister of Education and the critic who just spoke on Wednesday of last week, where there was an offer for a full disclosure of what was in the plan, and I think even a meeting with officials so that he and therefore all of his colleagues would have access to it. Mr. Speaker, he knew that, and still this day the Leader of the Opposition authorizes a motion of privilege to play games with the issue, to say, well members over there didn't have information before it hit the public and before it was raised at Arcola School, Mr. Speaker.

What is going on over there? Who is providing leadership? Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue for the province. What we don't need is NDP political games, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Broten: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that when we're talking about something as serious as gay-straight alliances, talking about suicides of youth, Mr. Speaker, attempted suicides, that we're entering into a discussion here about what House leaders sort out, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, all members of the Assembly have the right to have information as it is shared so that everyone can do their jobs, Mr. Speaker. House leaders will carry on this discussion through the points of privilege, Mr. Speaker, but my point is, these are serious matters, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we're asking the serious questions on behalf of youth.

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Mr. Speaker, these are very serious issues. And what we do not need is the NDP opposition playing games with motions in the Assembly. The Leader of the

Opposition's right, Mr. Speaker. In fact the Minister of Education offered all of the specifics to the critic on Wednesday before. The Leader of the Opposition's relatively new as a leader in this Assembly. Mr. Speaker, someday I think he'll learn that at some point in the life of this job — and I have certainly done it — you just have to stand up and apologize, apologize that these were the wrong tactics, apologize that they minimized the important issue of bullying in the province of Saskatchewan.

N.S. VOL. 55 NO. 65A THURSDAY, MAY 16, 2013, 10:00

Gay-Straight Alliances and Combatting Bullying

Mr. Broten: Mr. Speaker, the Premier seems very concerned with process today as we talk about Bill 85. Everyone knows in the province that we have been fighting for a better way forward for Bill 85. We've been fighting for better transparency and for Saskatchewan workers.

Mr. Speaker, we've also been constructive coming forward on the areas of diversity, equality, and human rights. And it's for that reason, Mr. Speaker, after I was appointed leader that I appointed the member from Saskatoon Centre as our critic in this important area. And I also brought forward a suggestion to the government that they post some information on their ministry website about the benefits of gay-straight alliances in our schools and how this can serve to protect students and ensure that we have a healthy learning environment for everyone.

And I hate the thought, Mr. Speaker, of a student who wakes up in the morning and is fearful to go to school because they are gay. That is simply not acceptable in Saskatchewan, and we all have a responsibility to ensure all students are safe. Although the Premier initially rejected the idea of putting it on the website, I am pleased that it is now on the website because this is simply the right thing to do.

But I'm concerned about the Premier's initial reaction when this was raised in the Assembly because he sought to exploit the divisions in the province, as opposed to considering the safety of all students. And I'm hugely concerned about the message that that sends to LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender] youth here in the province, especially those that are being bullied, especially those who are out in their schools.

So my question to the Premier: having taken that initial approach that's one of division, as opposed to safety for students, how does he intend to heal the divisions that he sought to exploit in his initial response?

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition's preamble spoke to the fervour with which they fought Bill 85. I think the question he just asked prior to this one, I think that was the first question he's actually stood to ask in this legislature on

behalf of those union leaders, on behalf of the Meili camp, Mr. Speaker, the very first question other than estimates. He has a labour critic who, when asked by the media what's wrong with Bill 85, couldn't actually point to anything in particular. Not a recorded division, Mr. Speaker, not a standing vote.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the issue on gay-straight alliances and information available, the change has been made on the website, and that notwithstanding, Mr. Speaker, we're going to work with Nova Scotia on cyberbullying. We have a Legislative Secretary appointed, and the member for Saskatoon Fairview is going to canvass all of the issues because bullying goes beyond the issue that has been raised in terms of LGBT issues. Mr. Speaker, the gay-straight alliance information is now available on the website of the Ministry of Education but, Mr. Speaker, we're going to go beyond that to fight bullying in Saskatchewan.

N.S. VOL. 55 NO. 48A WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2013, 13:30

Combatting Discrimination and Bullying

Mr. Broten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my last question to the Minister of Advanced Education, as he was commenting on the asbestos legislation he made an interesting point, Mr. Speaker. He talked about how the government website would be updated so Saskatchewan people could find out about the asbestos registry, how it could benefit their families. I think that's a good step, a very common sense step, Mr. Speaker.

What a contrast, Mr. Speaker, to what we heard from the Education minister yesterday when we were talking about gay-straight alliances here in the province — a complete refusal to simply update the government website. A very easy step, would not cost any money, and could be done tomorrow.

My question to the Premier: why is it that this double standard . . . Why is it that the Minister of Advanced Education can post information on a government website about the existence of an asbestos registry, but when it comes to a gay-straight alliance, simply providing some information, not a legislative change, simply providing information to Saskatchewan students and parents, why is that not allowed? Why is he allowing this double standard?

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly not a double standard at all. We're at the end of a process that, to the credit of the Leader of the Opposition, was initiated in many respects by him in terms of the legislation. As you get towards the end of a process, then you look to communication tools. And, Mr. Speaker, the minister said that's what would happen. That's precisely what we've said with respect to the issue of gay-straight alliances or bullying in general in terms of information on the website. We have a member, the member for Fairview who's going to be doing some work in this

particular issue. And all avenues of communication will be considered.

Mr. Speaker, though with respect to anti-bullying in all of its forms, including information provision for gay-straight alliances but also around cyberbullying, I can tell you and members of the House that the Minister of Education, the ministry is looking at ways to speed up that process. I think as of today he can provide a bit more details.

I want to finish though on the topic of double standards. Yesterday though in this Assembly, the Leader of the Opposition stood up, asked that same minister to fund, fully fund First Nations schools in terms of the provincial level off-reserve to the federal level on-reserve. Mr. Speaker, at the convention, at the NDP convention, that same Leader of the Opposition said he wouldn't commit to that kind of funding, and moreover, moreover, Mr. Speaker, you can check an MBC [Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation] story that says the NDP will not provide that funding where the federal government wouldn't.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition hasn't met a position of the party he hasn't changed yet. And he needs to determine exactly what his direction will be and stop frankly trying to work both sides of the street.

N.S. VOL. 55 NO. 47A TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2013, 13:30

Combatting Discrimination and Bullying

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Halla Scott is here with us in the gallery today. She, like other students, are interested in forming gay-straight alliances in their schools. And the Premier said last week here in question period, and I quote, “. . . these clubs can be formed in schools today in the province of Saskatchewan. I don't think the Government of Saskatchewan would stand in the way of that happening.” But, Mr. Speaker, when we asked if the Sask Party government would simply update the government's website to include information on how to form GSAs [gay-straight alliance], they refused.

To the Minister of Education: why can't the ministry put up information about GSAs on its website so that interested students and teachers have resources about how to form GSAs?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Marchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member opposite for the question. Mr. Speaker, we take these matters very, very seriously. We believe that all children in our schools, in our school system have a right to a warm, caring, and safe environment to learn in, Mr. Speaker.

Over the course of my career, Mr. Speaker, I've dealt with many, many different kinds of issues, Mr. Speaker — name-calling, colour of hair, the side of the street you live on, the side of the town you live on, Mr. Speaker, racial slurs, clothes, and, Mr. Speaker, sexual

orientation. Mr. Speaker, dealing with bullying really comes down to respecting differences.

And, Mr. Speaker, the Government of Saskatchewan will do all that it can to ensure that our children learn about respecting differences. And we will continue to work with the Legislative Secretary, and I don't want to preclude any kind of results from that, as our Premier has already alluded to, Mr. Speaker. And so we will continue to look at that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Supporting GSAs is the right thing to do to create safe spaces in our schools. This morning in a radio interview, Halla talked of her struggles to form or start a GSA in her high school. She looked for help in forming one but felt that she didn't have the support.

The school board says forming a GSA is a straightforward process. An official from the school board said students or teachers are to, and I quote, “. . . approach a principal, and the principal relays it to me, and I basically give the application to our director of education.” Mr. Speaker, it sounds as if simply more information is needed by all parties. This is an easy solution and the government can play a lead role today. Mr. Speaker, why can't the Sask Party government do the right thing and put the information about GSAs and how they are formed on the government's website?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Marchuk: Mr. Speaker, the solution to bullying is not simple. It's a community, it's a community issue, Mr. Speaker. There is a great deal of information that needs to be gathered, that needs to be discussed with many different community partners — our young people most importantly, Mr. Speaker.

I know that our Legislative Secretary will be conducting forums throughout the province where she will talk directly with students to find out how they perceive life in their schools and how safe they feel. And through that whole process, Mr. Speaker, again which is a complicated process, we will hopefully come to a Saskatchewan action plan on bullying, Mr. Speaker, that will include GSAs and the many other differences that we need to learn to respect, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, students, parents, teachers, school administrators all know, they all know that GSAs are a positive option about creating safe spaces in our schools. But the Sask Party government is being stubborn and is out of touch with today's Saskatchewan. Students need simple, easy-to-understand information about how GSAs can be formed and who they should talk to in their schools to create one today.

Will the government admit they made a mistake last week? Will the minister direct his officials to put helpful information on the government's website for students and teachers

interested in forming gay-straight alliances today?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Marchuk: Mr. Speaker, again thank you to the member opposite for the question. This is a serious matter, Mr. Speaker. When I found out about the situation that was reported in the media this morning, I immediately had ministry officials contact the school division for confirmation. And indeed, they reported that it's not the case, that they would be prepared to . . . In no way, shape, or form would they prohibit the formation of a GSA in their school, Mr. Speaker. And so we trust that and we will continue to work with them.

Mr. Speaker, another part of our student achievement initiative that will help us to gauge the environment in our schools is the Tell Them for Me survey, Mr. Speaker. It's a student perceptual survey that will provide endless data on student perceptions, community perceptions, and teaching perceptions of what goes on in the schools. And hopefully by gathering that data, Mr. Speaker, we'll be able to protect our children, all children, Mr. Speaker, and respect all differences.